

## Support the internationalisation process of citizens

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### Abstract

In the monolingual English-speaking world referred to as the 'Anglobubble', governments are finally recognising the advantages of a citizenry able to engage in and between multiple languages and cultures. As a result, increased efforts are being made to introduce and expand educational programs to teach languages. Thus, now more than ever, an appropriate language teacher supply is needed to support the internationalisation process of citizens. However, a language teacher supply crisis is emerging. The content analysis study reported here, explored how the issue of language teacher supply was portrayed in print-based newspaper media from six English-speaking countries between 2010 and 2015.

**Keywords:** language teachers, internationalization, educational programs

### Introduction

A shortage of language teachers is threatening the efficacy of language education programs across many English-speaking countries (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2011; Friedman, 2015; McElroy, 2015; Ratcliffe, 2013). While the shortage of language teachers has been given some attention in political and academic circles, this paper attempts to investigate public perceptions and popular social discourse, as reflected in its representation and portrayal in mainstream media. The authors were encouraged by a recent paper published in *Issues*

in Educational Research, which analysed media coverage of teacher shortages in Australia, and encouraged other researchers to "examine the reporting of other educational issues to ascertain whether the tendency to negative and superficial reporting is widespread" (Shine, 2015, p. 511). This paper presents insights about the particular issue of language teacher supply, and takes an international focus.

This paper investigates the media coverage regarding language teacher supply in six English-speaking countries: Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States. These countries have been referred to collectively as the 'Anglobubble', a "part of the world, with a concentration of monolingual English speakers, that operates in English, thinks it only natural that everything should happen in English and should logically be experienced and understood in English" (Hajek, 2014, para. 2). In each of these countries various programs and policies have been adopted to improve the state of language education, and important inroads have been made. However, there is still much more to be done to ensure that the opportunity to learn other languages is available for all students.

Despite the broad commonalities of the six countries, there are key social, political, and historical differences which make each country's situation unique. Unfortunately, the space limitation of this paper precludes a more in-depth discussion of each country, although key differences are presented throughout the paper as they become apparent through the differences in media coverage.

### **Research methodology**

The design of the study was a content analysis of paper-based newspaper articles from Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States. Paper-based newspapers were chosen because, despite the rapid growth in online channels for news distribution, most newspaper reading still happens in print (Barthel, 2015). Furthermore, print-based newspapers remain a powerful tool in shaping public opinion and influencing policy (Greenslade, 2011).

Data were collected from print-based newspapers, using the online databases ProQuest Newsstand, ProQuest Australia and New Zealand Newsstand, Canadian Newsstand Complete, and UK Newsstand. These databases were selected because they cover more than 2000 newspaper titles from all six countries under investigation. Combinations of the search terms 'foreign', 'second', 'language', 'teacher', 'supply', 'recruitment', 'attrition', 'retention', and 'shortage' were used. Included in the analysis

were original, full-text, print-based newspaper articles, from January 2010 to December 2015, which made at least one mention of the supply of language teachers in schools. Editorials and letters to the editor were not within the scope of this study because they are of personal and opinion-based nature.

Content analysis is an empirically grounded method of analysing meaningful matter, "that is, data whose physical manifestations are secondary to what they mean to particular populations of people" (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 5). Newspapers often come under the eye of content analysis researchers, due to their significant impact on public awareness. Online channels are becoming increasingly popular methods for the dissemination and consumption of news media. However, with a longer history of investigative journalism, newspapers have been found to wield considerable influence over the content of newer media (McCombs, Holbert, Kiousis & Wanta, 2011; Pew Research Centre, 2010). "As well as influencing public opinion, mass media reflect opinion and perceptions through reporting what other people, companies and organizations are saying and doing" (Macnamara, 2005, p. 21), and as such is an ideal way of better understanding the issue of language teacher supply.

As proposed by Neuendorf (2002), analyses were conducted of both the form and content characteristics of the newspaper coverage in relation to language teacher supply. In a content analysis, it is important to consider content and form characteristics, in particular, because "form characteristics are often extremely important mediators of the content elements" (p. 24). Therefore, the research study adopted a six-step process to analyse the content and form of the articles, starting with familiarisation, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, and defining and naming themes, before developing the final report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To ensure reliability and replicability of the findings, explicit coding instructions were used by two coders to ensure that obtained ratings were "not the idiosyncratic results of one rater's subjective judgement" (Tinsley & Weiss, 1975, p. 359). The results of the analyses are also available for review, introducing transparency and accountability.

### **Results and discussion**

When interpreting the outcomes of the data analysis, it is important to bear in mind that regional, national and international news competes constantly for limited space in print-based newspapers. The issue of language teacher supply is educational in nature, thus may not have the edge needed to compete with other more sensational headlines (West, White-

hurst & Dionne, 2009). Despite this competition for space, the issue of language teacher supply is one that was discussed in 80 articles between 2010 and 2015. These articles met the criteria for inclusion in the study, and were given a code from M1 to M80. In summary, the articles came from the six countries of the 'Anglobubble', in order of frequency these were Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, the United States, and Ireland, with details shown in Figure 1.

The higher level of visibility of language teacher supply in Australia is most reasonably explained by the high level of policy development that has been seen there for over three decades (Liddicoat, 2010; Poyatos Matas & Mason, 2015). One article (M9) reported that "every new minister at some point has a love affair with languages and (promises) a lot of short-term funding ... Then it disappears" (Ross, 2014). Adding to this, the new Australian Curriculum: Languages was being drafted, debated and implemented during the analysis period, and this has kept issues of teacher supply visible. Figure 2 shows unsurprisingly that increases in media attention are often seen prior to and immediately following the release of educational policy. While this regular policy activity is driving media coverage, it has also been noted as one possible factor exacerbating the language teacher shortage, as it engenders instability in employment opportunities, which ebb and flow depending on the aims of each new policy (M9).

As shown in Table 1, over 96% of articles (77/80) reported a shortage of language teachers. The exceptions include the single article from Ireland, which reported a lack of job opportunities for Irish education graduates. The article noted that Irish teachers were leaving to fill gaps in supply in England, with modern languages cited as an area of high demand. While the article did not mention specifically the state of language teachers in the country, it cited better working conditions and a "shortage of teaching posts" in general as possible reasons for teachers' move from Ireland to England. This suggests that concerns lie in a lack of quality job opportunities for graduates rather than issues of low teacher supply, and this would also explain the absence of media attention to the issue. Two further exceptions come from the state of New South Wales in Australia, where the Department of Education and Communities was cited in two articles published within three days of each other, that there was an adequate supply of language teachers (M12, M13). This position seems to have been contradicted by the statement that recent policy includes "a range of initiatives to further increase (language) teacher supply" (M12).

Several possible solutions to the problems are put forward through the media. According to the president of the Asian Studies of Australia, "additional inquiries are not needed ... What is needed is a range of straightforward, concrete and economical programs". Several suggestions are presented to the media, including cash incentives (M26), to "ensure the recruitment of a trained workforce" (M71), a "significant expansion in language learning during teacher training" (M72), and mandatory French methodology courses as part of all teacher certification in Canada (M47). In New Zealand, the Waikato Principals' Association president proposed a system whereby specialist teachers work across a number of schools (M56), a strategy that has had adverse effects in neighbouring Australia (Australian Council of State School Organisations, 2007; Mason, 2015).

Concrete data were presented only in the Australian and Canadian media, although the Australian data often presented more questions than it answered. For example, in the Australian state of Queensland, it was reported that 70 unregistered teachers were found to have been employed to teach languages (M5) as well as 25 teachers who had failed the proficiency examination (M9). It is unclear if these teachers were working on short-term contracts, or if efforts were being made to ensure they could gain the credentials required. In Canada, various reports commissioned by the non-profit volunteer parent-led organisation Canadian Parents for French were cited (M37, M38, M39, M40, M41, M43, M44, M46, M47), although it was not always clear which report was being referred to. A statistic quoted in four of the articles was that 85% of school districts reported challenges in finding qualified applicants for French bilingual programs (M37, M38, M40, M43). This finding comes from an analysis of data collected from 96% of school districts, and as such has much more rigour than the piece-meal information provided by the Australian media. The lack of rigorous and comprehensive data available in much of the Anglobubble has a serious impact on the ability of jurisdictions to make well-informed decisions for the future sustainability of language teaching.

The focus on Asian languages was seen predominantly in Australia and New Zealand, where governments of both countries have given strategic policy attention to increase economic and political ties in the region. Part of these policies has been a commitment to increasing the number of students learning an Asian language, including the widespread introduction of language education in primary schools from the late 1990s (Ministry of Education, 2012; Pietsch & Aarons, 2012).

The reason for the concerted focus on Mandarin is twofold. Firstly, there is a strong desire from Anglobubble governments to strategically align themselves with one of the world's biggest economic powers (Yueh, 2013). However, the economic rationale does not explain the lack of focus on Hindi, with India recently recognised as the world's fastest growing economy (Pandey, 2015), a prediction that was made more than a decade ago (Diamond, 2005). Nor does it explain the continued popularity of Japanese in educational policy, a country that continues its economic decline (Fujioka, 2015; Matthews, 2015). The answer then might be explained by the commitment of some governments to promote their languages and cultures around the world. The Confucius Institute and the Japan Foundation both have significant presence in the Anglobubble, while countries such as Indonesia are unable to fund such initiatives to support the wider teaching of its languages (McDonald, 2010). While the role of such initiatives is to promote language education, they have conveniently helped to fill gaps in teacher supply. In the United States, where there is "no specific funding for K-12 language instruction" (Schoof, 2013), The Confucius Institute has supplied language teacher assistants to schools (M8o), and this was also reported in New Zealand (M63).

With its reductive definition of Asia, more than two thousand other languages which are spoken across the Asian continent are excluded (Lewis, Simons & Fennig, 2016). That is not to forget the plethora of other languages that have cultural and historical significance across the Anglobubble, particularly indigenous languages, which were present in 10 articles. A large number of indigenous languages exist within the Anglobubble. There are over 350 languages that are indigenous to Australia (Lewis, Simons & Fennig, 2016), over 60 languages indigenous to Canada (Statistics Canada, 2015), while te reo Maori (the Maori language) is indigenous to New Zealand. There are currently ten indigenous languages spoken in the United Kingdom (NicDhùghaill, 2013), with Scottish Gaelic, Irish, and Cornish ratified by the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (Council of Europe, 2014). In the United States, around 160 languages native to Northern America were identified in the 2010 census (United States Department of Commerce, 2011).

Almost all indigenous languages around the world are in danger of disappearing forever (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 2016), and those in the Anglobubble are all suffering from a shortage of teachers to teach the next generation of speakers (Gilles & Battiste, 2013; Inspectorate of Education, 2011; United States Department

of Education, 2015; Worrall, 2014). Despite this, the discussion of indigenous languages in the media coverage analysed was limited to just two languages (Figure 3), te reo Maori and Scottish Gaelic, both of which have current educational policy which aims to protect and expand teaching of the language in schools, and their use in the wider community.

In Scotland, the 2011 census showed a slight decrease in the number of speakers of Gaelic, down to 1.1% of the population (National Records of Scotland, 2013). This led to the drafting of a major language revival policy, which included a goal of increasing the number of students engaged in Gaelic-medium instruction.

The continued revival of te reo Maori in New Zealand has been given considerable policy attention over the past 25 years, including particular attention to language programs in schools. While there has been some progress (Benton, 2015), currently almost 80% of all New Zealand school students receive no Maori language education, or their learning is limited to simple words, greetings, and songs (Ministry of Education, 2015). Four articles focused on te reo Maori (M56, M57, M58, M62). However, all references were cursory or generic in nature. This is contrasted with the media focus on Chinese in New Zealand Schools, which in four of the six cases included further discussions.

The omission of other indigenous languages in the media coverage on teacher supply does not mean that efforts are not being made to reverse the decline of indigenous education in the Anglobubble. This is particularly true in Australia, where thirty years ago the National Policy on Languages argued strongly for initiatives to support the maintenance of indigenous languages (Lo Bianco, 1987). More recently, Australia made a significant step forward, with the development of the Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages (Troy, 2015). While this is a positive step, the lack of discussion about the supply of teachers to implement the framework leaves some groups concerned that current efforts are unlikely to succeed because they fail to "tackle the real problems in language programs" (Worrall, 2014, para. 15). While teacher supply is just one of those problems, it is worthy of more media representation.

Bilingual education also had significant coverage in the media, particularly in Canada from 2012 onward. Bilingual, or immersion, education sees "the use of two languages as media of instruction for a child or a group of children in part or all of the school curriculum" (Cohen, 1975, p. 18). There is a strong body of research which recognises the cognitive and social benefits of immersion programs, and Canada is in a unique position to

draw on its bilingual history. In recent years, there has been an unprecedented increase in parents wanting to enrol their children in French bilingual programs. This increase has meant that the current supply of teachers is no longer sufficient.

### **Sources present (and absent) from the media**

The media coverage in the analysis included both human and textual sources (Table 5). In both Australia and Scotland, politicians and policy are the main sources of information. The discourse in these articles generally involved criticisms on past and potential policy failures, rather than promoting bilateral discussions. There was overwhelming opposition reported to a proposal to increase the teaching of second languages, particularly Gaelic, in Scottish schools (M67-M72). An opposition spokesperson made the following quote, which sums up the tone of the coverage of the issue.

... we reject utterly the idea that every pupil across Scotland should be taught Gaelic ... There is already a shortage of Gaelic teachers and to try to wheel out Gaelic lessons across every school in the country is not only impractical, but also unaffordable (M68).

In Canada, parents, and in particular the Canadian Parents for French organisation, were largely driving media attention, even more so than first appears in Table 5, because all of the ten non-government research reports quoted in the media were commissioned by that organisation. Their active advocacy, research and lobbying has contributed to the wider visibility of the issue than in most other areas, and has promoted a more positive discussion, as their ultimate aim lies not in winning elections, but in ensuring "that children would have the opportunity to become bilingual in the Canadian school system" (Canadian Parents for French, 2016).

The voices of language teachers were not widely present in the newspaper coverage, something that was also true in Shine's (2015) study. She explained the absence of teachers' voices, revealing that for journalists "it can be difficult to secure interviews with school teachers and principals in Australia because they are generally not able to speak to the media without express permission from their employer" (p. 511). This is also the case across the Anglobubble, where teachers have been punished for speaking in opposition to their employers (Edelman, 2015; Tickle, 2013; Veiga, 2015). In any case, language teacher associations and principals associations are better placed to speak to the media, removing potential conflicts of interest or restrictions placed on employees. Therefore, it may be ex-

pected that the voices of language teacher associations, which advocate on behalf of language teachers, might be more present, but this was not the case. This suggests that public advocacy and communication strategies could be improved.

### **Recommendations for future research**

Decisions were made during the research process to limit the scope of this study. While these delimitations were explained and justified throughout this paper, new avenues for research are presented. This study was limited to print-based newspapers. Online newspapers, opinion-based letters to the editor, and public online comment sections also influence and reflect public perceptions about social issues and, as such, warrant further investigation. Further, six English-speaking countries were chosen due to their English linguistic imperialism and general ambivalence toward learning a language other than English. In-depth investigation of each of the six countries is an area for future research. Investigating language teacher supply in non-English speaking countries would also provide an important point of comparison.

Finally, media outlets make subjective choices, not only about what issues to cover but which groups to give a voice to regarding the issue, and it is vital to listen to the voices of those who are missing. While academics are being called upon to provide their perspectives, empirical studies which present evidence-based solutions to address the language teacher shortage are not being discussed. The voices of language teachers themselves, those who sit at the pivot of policy and practice, are also not being heard. The authors make a call to both researchers and the media to give a voice to language teachers.

### **Conclusion**

The content analysis conducted on newspaper coverage of language teacher supply across the Anglobubble between 2010 and 2015 found that in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States, there is a shortage of qualified language teachers, and that this is framed in the media as a serious problem. Mirroring the findings of Shine's (2015) paper, this study also found that the issue of teacher supply was generally treated in a superficial manner, with more than half of the articles providing a brief mention of the problem, with no further discussion. The narrow nature of the media coverage can be seen as an indicator of the lack of social interest and political lobbying to bring visibility to the issue. In that sense, the issue of language teacher supply can be seen as re-

flective of the wider lack of social interest and value given to language education in many communities in English-speaking countries.

Interest in language education in the 'Anglobubble' is probably more widespread than the media focus would suggest, particularly as all of these countries have rich multilingual and multicultural populations. Language education has been used by many governments as a political tool for economic advantage. This has helped put and keep languages on the public agenda in many parts of the 'Anglobubble', particularly Australia. However, the economic rationale does not work as the main rationale for language education in schools. For those passionate about language education for their children, students, and citizens, there is much to learn from the grass-roots movement in Canada that is propelling changes in attitudes and action in improving language education, and challenging the monolingual mindset. Through activism and organisation, community members are engaging in the political process at a grass-roots level; lending their voices to the media, commissioning research, and driving public awareness. These actions are not only influencing the media coverage but also public perceptions about bilingual education and, in turn, there is more in-depth attention to the issue of teacher supply. By being fully engaged in the political process, these groups are also able to influence policy decisions, and place pressure on educational systems to provide the bilingual educational opportunities they value for their children.

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